

The Protocols of Zion



A Russian edition of *The Protocols of Zion*

The most pernicious and enduring source of modern anti-Semitism is a book called *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (often shortened to *The Protocols of Zion*). Though it claims to be evidence of a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world, *The Protocols of Zion* was actually a creation of Russian agents at the turn of the 20th century.

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A global conspiracy

The Protocols of Zion claims to be a written record of a meeting of Jewish elders held sometime in the late 1800s. During the course of this meeting, these elders outline and discuss their intention to take over the world. They then provide a step-by-step explanation of how this will be achieved.

The statements attributed to the elders at this alleged meeting suggest a lust for power and global domination, underpinned by disdain and disregard for non-Jewish people.

There is clear and definitive historical evidence that *The Protocols of Zion* is bogus, a dishonest forgery invented to discredit the Jewish people and incite racial hatred. Despite this, the content of *The Protocols of Zion* has been accepted as fact and repeated by thousands of people. In many respects, it has become the handbook or bible of modern anti-Semitism.

Russian anti-Semitism

The Protocols of Zion first appeared in Russia in the first years of the 20th century. At this time, the Russian Empire was the most fertile source of anti-Semitism in Europe.

In 1900, Russia was home to five million Jews (around 4% of the total world population). Most Russians lived in rural villages where life, culture and religious beliefs had not changed markedly since the Middle Ages. Russian Jews were periodically targeted as scapegoats for any adverse event: from droughts to crop failures, from increased taxes to outbreaks of disease.

The 'blood libel', the myth that Jews kidnapped and sacrificed children, was also common in early 20th century Russia. A notable example was the 1913 trial of Menahem Beilis, a Jewish factory foreman who was falsely accused of murdering a teenage boy. Beilis was eventually acquitted but his trial exposed the intensity and irrational nature of Russian anti-Semitism.

Nicholas II

Russian Jew-hating was not confined to the lower-classes. The tsar himself, Nicholas II, was an avowed anti-Semite who blamed Jews for the problems afflicting his empire and occasionally lurched into long racist diatribes. His anti-Semitism was shared by members of the Russian Orthodox Church and reactionary political groups like the 'Black Hundred'.

In 1903, agents of the 'Black Hundred' and other pro-tsarist groups whipped up a series of *pogroms* (anti-Jewish riots) across Russia. Between 2,000 and 2,500 Russian Jews were murdered by their own countrymen, incited by rumours of Jewish plots. Jewish communities were disbanded or driven out of certain areas, their property destroyed or confiscated.

The *pogroms* against Jews in Russia generated international outrage and led to thousands of Russian Jews fleeing abroad. It was in this poisonous environment that *The Protocols of Zion* were born.

Origins of the *Protocols*

Most historians believe the *Protocols of Zion* were created by agents of the *Okhrana*, the tsar's secret police unit, using plagiarised text from an 1864 French satire.

The Protocols first appeared in print in 1903, in serialised form in a right-wing Russian newspaper. For the next four years the full text, or extracts from it, were re-published and circulated around the Russian Empire.

The Protocols was used to suggest or imply that Russia's domestic problems were caused by malevolent Jewish forces or influences. Again, the Jews became a ready-made scapegoat for the tsar's own mismanagement and political failings.

A response to Zionism

The suggestion that Jews were hell-bent on world domination was not new. The idea had been propagated by French and German authors for at least three decades.

The notion of a 'Jewish world conspiracy' was partly fuelled by the First Zionist Congress, an 1897 conference in Switzerland attended by European Jewish leaders. The main focus of the congress was discussion about a potential homeland for Jewish people – but extremists claimed it as evidence of a more sinister objectives.

The appearance of the *Protocols* not only reinforced this conspiracy theory, it also provided detail about how the Jews intended to achieve 'world domination'. Among the methods outlined in the *Protocols*:

- Jews would gradually gain control of financial cornerstones, such as banks, gold and credit. This control would allow them to manipulate and control the economy.
- By acquiring ownership and control of the press and other media, Jews would be able to shape public opinion.
- Jewish academics would also rise to prominent positions in universities, allowing them to control education, ideology, thought and culture.
- Once their economic control was established, Jews would deliberately initiate economic recessions and depressions,

- creating unemployment and undermining public confidence in the government.
- Jews would also increase and expand their own power by sparking meaningless but brutal wars, which would weaken public morale and make people more susceptible to suggestion and propaganda.
 - Jewish-owned corporations would produce and sell cheap alcohol and pornography. The ready availability of these dangerous and morally questionable commodities would also weaken and undermine society.

The conspiracy spreads

The Protocols of Zion was widely circulated and published after World War I. Many attributed the Russian Revolution (1917) and the rise of communism to Jewish conspiracies.

The highest profile supporter and publisher of *The Protocols of Zion* was Henry Ford, the American industrialist who became very wealthy by revolutionising the mass production of automobiles.

Using his own money, Ford had printing presses run off a half-million copies of *The Protocols of Zion* for distribution. He also bought and operated a small newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, which between 1920 and 1922 published articles reflecting the content of the *Protocols*.

Ford was later forced to apologise, though he remained a fervent anti-Semite. In the 1930s, he became a strong supporter of the German Nazi Party and corresponded frequently with Adolf Hitler. Hitler himself had read *The Protocols of Zion*. In his biography, *Mein Kampf*, he proclaimed that “they reveal the nature and activity of the Jewish people and expose their inner contexts as well as their ultimate final aims”.

The forgery uncovered

The Protocols of Zion was also published in Britain, under the title *The Jewish Peril*. In 1920-21, a journalist from London newspaper *The Times* conducted an investigation into *The Protocols*, their content and origin. It was traced back to Sergei Nilus, a bureaucrat in tsarist Russia who claimed to have been handed the manuscript by an unnamed associate.

According to *The Times'* investigation, *The Protocols of Zion* were concocted to convince other Russians that political unrest in the

country was being caused by Jews, rather than the repressive policies of the tsarist government.

The Times went on to add:

“[The Protocols] have done harm not so much, in the writer’s opinion, by arousing anti-Jewish feeling, which is older than the Protocols and will persist in all countries where there is a Jewish problem until that problem is solved. Rather, they have done harm by persuading all sorts of mostly well-to-do people that every recent manifestation of discontent on the part of the poor is an unnatural phenomenon, a factitious agitation caused by a secret society of Jews.”

5key points

1. *The Protocols of Zion* is the title of a book summarising an alleged Jewish plot to take over the world.
2. It was probably created around 1903, most likely by agents of the tsarist government’s secret police.
3. It purports to be the minutes of a coven of Jewish elders, who discuss ways in which they will achieve world control.
4. Among the methods they outline are control of banking, finance, the media, education and government.
5. *The Protocols* underpins most modern anti-Semitism and baseless theories about a Jewish conspiracy.